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2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

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MAJORITY (202) 225-5074  
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For further information:  
Karen Lightfoot (202) 225-5051

### Federal Inspector at Wampler Foods Details USDA Failure to Protect the Public from Deadly *Listeria* Outbreak

Today Rep. Henry A. Waxman wrote USDA Secretary Ann M. Veneman with new information about the *Listeria* outbreak this year that killed seven, hospitalized dozens, caused miscarriages and stillbirths, and led to the largest food recall in U.S. history.

In the letter, Rep. Waxman relates what he has learned from several people, including a USDA inspector, who worked inside the Wampler Foods poultry plant in Pennsylvania that has been linked to the outbreak. These individuals assert:

- ▶ The USDA inspector in charge at the Wampler plant learned of extensive *Listeria* contamination from company testing in the spring of 2002, at least four months before the recall, but did not take necessary action to reduce the risk to consumers. Until now, USDA officials have denied having any knowledge of *Listeria* at the plant until shortly before the recall on October 13.
- ▶ Routine USDA testing of Wampler Foods poultry for *Listeria* prior to the recall was basically rigged, as company management received over a week's advance notice of testing that was supposed to be random.
- ▶ USDA food safety officials were long aware of widespread sanitary violations at the plant, including several serious problems that directly risked *Listeria* contamination. These included Wampler employees preparing raw turkey wings in the same room as ready-to-eat chicken salad, employees picking up food off the floor and putting it back in production, and condensation from overhead structures dripping right onto ready-to-eat product. However, USDA did not take necessary action to protect consumers.

"If what I have been told is true, USDA abdicated its duty to protect the consumer," Rep. Waxman said. "Secretary Veneman should cooperate fully with my investigation. Congress and the public need to know what happened at the Wampler plant so this tragedy doesn't happen again."

Rep. Henry A. Waxman is the ranking Democrat on the Government Reform Committee. The letter is available on the website of the minority office of the Committee on Government Reform: [www.reform.house.gov/min](http://www.reform.house.gov/min).